



Extremely smart, but still having problems?

Being gifted is nice, but doesn't always automatically lead to good achievements in school or to a happy life. Delay in getting a diploma or quitting school is often preventable if both the student and the people around him/her would pay more attention to the characteristics and needs of a gifted person. Even though there isn't much scientific information available, we can give some information and advice for students at college and university that is based on our experiences.

What is giftedness?

The many definitions of giftedness that exist always mention having a high intelligence, besides other characteristics. At the IHBV we use the description created by a panel of twenty Dutch experts in 2008 through a Delphi study:

*A quick and clever thinker, who likes to deal with complex matters. Autonomous, passionate and inquisitive. A sensitive and emotionally rich individual, living intensely. He or she enjoys being creative.*¹

There are a number of factors that prevent gifted people from being highly achieving students and being happy. We will discuss some of them.

Recognising giftedness

- I expected a lot more from the subject, is this all?
- I would like a lot more elaboration, why isn't it there?
- Why aren't I allowed to ask my questions?
- How is it possible that the teacher finds me threatening?
- Is this professor/teacher maybe stupid?
- I feel different from other students; what's wrong with me?
- I'm not sure about my capabilities; why?
- I'm not passing my exams, even though I have mastered the material; how is that possible?
- Why are the questions so stupid on the exams?
- Why do I have such a problem making choices?
- Why aren't I motivated to finish this course?

Maybe you know already that you are gifted. That doesn't mean that no issues will ever arise. Sometimes gifted people are ashamed to mention their giftedness to teachers and student advisors, or they doubt their intelligence when studying is harder than expected. There are a number of factors that can contribute to gifted people not being able to study easily and feel happy.

Being different

Many gifted people have felt different from a young age. Among other things, this has to do with their quick way of thinking and their way of perceiving and analysing. When they or their parents don't know that the difference lies in being gifted, then this can lead to feelings of alienation, loneliness and sometimes psychological problems. For the gifted, as for anyone else, it's important to talk to and make friends with people at the same level of development. This can prevent loneliness and being unhappy.

Learning (and) studying

A gifted person starting at university or college will often have high expectations. At college and university there will, on average, be more gifted students and teachers than in secondary schools, but even there they are the exceptions to

the rule. Besides that, gifted students often have a different style of learning than the average student;² they mostly need insight and elaboration. Reproducing facts is often tricky, while they do like to learn things based on insight.

They haven't always developed enough effective studying skills and metacognitive skills. Gifted students can also experience performance anxiety and psychological issues. Dyslexia and dyscalculia may have been masked by giftedness, and not lead to problems right from the start.

Recommendations

- Are you experiencing learning problems? Try to map them out with the help of a student advisor or dean and address the issues you find. For example: learn how to deal with performance anxiety and learning metacognitive skills, like planning and reflecting on the way you study.
- Try to find out if there is a program for gifted students. Take the initiative to challenge yourself and expand your skill set. Use your right to take free classes. Consult with the teacher or student advisor to find out what your options are.
- Some gifted people find themselves better suited to vocational training than college or university.
- Honours programs are good for some gifted people, but not for others. Find out what you like. You can just take extra classes on the side, such as philosophy. And there are of course options outside the educational system: sports, music or volunteering.
- Some gifted students like the more general basic education that a number of colleges and University Colleges offer. This will allow the possibility to delay a more definite choice for some time.
- Use your 'giftedness-antenna' to find other gifted people (teachers and other students) and which studies draw more gifted people.
- When trying to find help with psychological issues we recommend coaching or counseling to learn deal with your giftedness before anything else.
- On www.ihbv.nl/international you find a list of coaches specialised in giftedness.
- On the (Dutch) website of HB-Forum.nl is an active group of young people. In 7 cities in the Netherlands is a HB-café. You can visit Facebook groups, [peers2gather](#) and [Mensa](#).

References

1. Kooijman - van Thiel, M.B.G M. (red). *Hoogbegaafd. Dat zie je zó! Over zelfbeeld en imago van hoogbegaafden* (Gifted, obvious! On identity and self-image of Gifted Persons). Ede: OYA, 2008. [Dutch.]
2. Ven, R. van de & Nauta, N. *Gifted adults and their preferred style of learning*. 2012: <http://ihbv.nl/international/english/publications/>